



(U) InSIDer's View of History: 'Soviet Rocket' Strikes Chicksands

FROM: Al Gray
Deputy Director, Meade Operations Center (S3304)
Run Date: 04/02/2004

FROM: Al Gray
Deputy Director, Meade Operations Center (S3304)

(U//FOUO) The year 1957 was auspicious for a number of reasons. It was the year that the U.S. and the Soviet Union were making dramatic efforts to be the first to fire an Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) and, as a related effort, to orbit a satellite in space. In mid-May, the Soviets made their first, unsuccessful attempt to launch an ICBM. Success would follow later that summer, but during the better part of that year the newspapers were full of stories of these efforts, with much speculation on progress ranging the spectrum from believable stories to pure fantasy.



(C) Meanwhile, at RAF Chicksands, a large Air Force COMINT collection site north of London, two young lieutenants were sore at the military for putting them through jet fighter training classes. The peace talks in Korea had diminished the Air Force's need for fighter jocks, relegating them to "flying" large gray desks at the Chicksands operations site instead. They used a number of innovative ways to have themselves mustered out of their obligated service so they could pursue flying careers in civilian life. To that point, none had achieved success.

(U//FOUO) One particular adventure almost brought about the success they sought. Using all of their creative imagination, reportedly enhanced by a liberal application of libations at a nearby pub one night, they took action to capitalize on the current wave of news stories about Soviet progress in their space program.

(U//FOUO) They obtained from the base Motor Pool a 12-foot length of sewer pipe, created a nose cone and tail fins, and welded them in the appropriate spots on the sewer pipe, creating a "rocket." (In those days, many people used the terms 'missile' and 'rocket' indiscriminately.) They painted it red and white, much as they imagined a real rocket would be painted. They also enlisted a young Air Force linguist to inscribe in Cyrillic something to the effect that the 'rocket' belonged to a named scientific academy in Moscow, and the address to which it should be "returned" if found in any unusual location.

(U//FOUO) As far-fetched as this sounds today, in the dimite of 1957, when space programs were still a matter of some fantasy, there appeared a real opportunity to spoof many on Chicksands, if the 'rocket' was given publicity in some unique manner.

(U//FOUO) The plot was hatched late one night, after some more libation in that same pub. The two lieutenants took the 'rocket' from its hiding place and toted it to the middle of the large green field fronting on Chicksands Priory, where the major portion of foot



SERIES:

(U) InSIDer's View of History '04

1. [InSIDer's View of History ... A Lesson in Personal Accountability](#)
2. [InSIDer's View of History : How a Four Star General Once Waited for a Lowly Captain to Finish Eating Lunch](#)
3. [InSIDer's View of History : In SHAPE, In France](#)
4. [InSIDer's View of History : 'Soviet Rocket' Strikes Chicksands](#)
5. [InSIDer's View of History: Onboard Air Force Two Bound for Moscow](#)
6. [InSIDer's View of History : Testifying Before Congress... Who Turned Out the Lights?](#)
7. [InSIDer's View of History : Resourceful NCOs at Goodfellow](#)
8. [InSIDer's View of History : Desert One - The Iranian Hostage Rescue Mission](#)
9. [InSIDer's View of History : SIGINT Appearing in the Press](#)
10. [InSIDer's View of History : Meeting President Reagan](#)
11. [InSIDer's View of History : 'Local Support' as Stress Management](#)

and road traffic passed close by, enhancing the potential for shock value, and public display. In the dark of that night, they dug a hole in the ground sufficient to hold the 'rocket' in an upright position, and eased it into the hole. They then took the remainder of their liquid refreshments up the hill and alongside the Officers Club, sat and sipped their refreshments, awaiting dawn and the hoped-for reaction of base personnel.



12. [In SID er's View of History : Quite a Welcome!](#)
13. [In SID er's View of History : The Adventure Continues -- Evacuation from Belgrade](#)

(U//FOUO) Everything (except one factor) happened as planned. The "rocket" was discovered, reported to the Air Police, the Base Commander, and other leaders on base. What didn't occur according to plan was the lieutenants' approach to the Base Commander, acknowledging their prank before he had the time to notify officials off-base. They both had fallen asleep during that critical time period.

(U//FOUO) As it turned out, newspapers were notified; the American embassy was alerted; the local police; British CID; and reportedly even scientists at Wright Patterson AFB were in the process of preparing to board a flight to the UK to inspect the Soviet 'rocket' before anyone could correct the record.

(U//FOUO) It made a good news story. It also created the opportunity for the Base Commander to "counsel" the lieutenants in a way they likely would never forget. The story was repeated throughout USAF Security Service (now AIA) circles for many years. Tame, perhaps, by today's standards, but it was quite the topic back then.

(U) *Note from SIGINT Communications: if you missed it, have a look at the [previous InSIDer's View of History](#) from [REDACTED]. Also, please send us YOUR story!... see our [call for submissions](#) for details.*

"(U//FOUO) SIDtoday articles may not be republished or reposted outside NSANet without the consent of S0121 ([DL sid co mms](#))."